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TAGS: PINT, VE

SUBJECT: INTERNAL MANEUVERING WITHIN THE RULING ACCION DEMOCRATICA
PARTY

SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH THE NEXT VENEZUELAN NATIONAL ELECTIONS WILL NOT TAKE PLACE UNTIL 1978, INTENSE MANEUVERING HAS ALREADY BEGUN WITHIN THE HIERARCHY OF THE GOVERNING ACCION DEMOCRATICA PARTY FOR THE PARTY'S PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION. AT THE MOMENT THE FRONT RUNNER IS EX-INTERIOR MINISTER AND NEW PARTY POLITICAL SECRETARY LUIS PINERUA ORDAZ. PRESIDENT PEREZ IS STAYING OUT OF THESE MANEUVERINGS, ANXIOUS TO AVOID INTRA-PARTY SQUABBLING SO FAR IN ADVANCE OF THE 1978 ELECTIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (CEN) OF THE RULING ACCION DEMOCRATICA PARTY JANUARY 28 UNANIMOUSLY ELECTED AD DEPUTY AND HITHERTO PARTY UNDER SECRETARY GENERAL CARLOS CANACHE MATA AS SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE PARTY AND AD DEPUTY LUIS PINERUA ORDAZ AS EXECUTIVE POLITICAL SECRETARY. PINERUA LAST WEEK RESIGNED AS MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR AND WAS REPLACED IN THAT POSITION BY AD SENATOR OCTAVIO LEPAGE, WHO HAD BEEN SERVING AS AD SECRETARY GENERAL SINCE 1972 AND WHOSE RESIGNATION FROM THAT POSITION TO BECOME MINISTER HAD OCCASIONED THE NEED FOR THE ELCTION OF A NEW SECRETARY GENERAL. ON JANUARY 28 THE ACCION DEMOCRATICA CEN ALSO APPROVED RULES FOR THE ELECTION OF THE VARIOUS LEVELS OF AD YOUTH LEADERS AND AGREED TO NAME A SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO
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SUPERVISE ELECTION OF THE AD LEADERSHIP IN THE CITY OF CARACAS.

FINALLY, THE CEN DESIGNATED AD DEPUTY DAVID MORALES BELLO TO REPRESENT THE PARTY AT A MEETING NEXT MONTH IN MEXICO TO EXAMINE THE SITUATION IN CHILE (SEPTEL).

2. ACCION DEMOCRATICA IS THEREFORE BEGINNING TO PREPARE FOR ITS NATIONAL CONVENTION TENTATIVELY SCHEDULED TO BEGIN JULY 17, WHICH WILL CHOOSE A NEW SECRETARY GENERAL (TO REPLACE THE STOPGAP CANACHE) AND OTHER NATIONAL LEADERS OF THE PARTY. THSE LEADERS WILL PREPARE FOR THE AD NATIONAL CONVENTION TO BE HELD IN 1978 OR SOONER, WHICH WILL IN TURN SELECT AD'S PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE FOR THE 1978 NATIONAL ELECTIONS. PARTY ELECTIONS AT THE LOCAL AND DISTRICT LEVELS LEADING UP TO THIS YEAR'S NATIONAL CONVENTION WILL BEGIN IN FEBRUARY.

3. THE SMOOTH TRANSITION OF LUIS PINERUA ORDAZ FROM INTERIOR MINISTER TO AD POLITICAL SECRETARY CLEARLY INDICATES THAT AS OF NOW HE IS THE LEADING CONTENDER FOR THE AD PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION. HE APPARENTLY HAS THE BLESSING OF PARTY PRESIDENT SENATOR GONZALO BARRIOS, AND THE TACIT SUPPORT OF NEW INTERIOR MINISTER LEPAGE. REPORTEDLY PINERUA IS IN LINE TO BECOME UNDER SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE PARTY BEFORE ITS JULY NATIONAL CONVENTION AND THUS A VERY STRONG CONTESTANT FOR THE KEY PARTY POST OF SECRETARY GENERAL, TRADITIONALLY THE SPRINGBOARD FOR THE AD PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE.

4. ALTHOUGH THE NEXT VENEZUELAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS ARE STILL ALMOST FOUR YEARS AWAY, SERIOUS MANEUVERING HAS ALREADY BEEN UNDERWAY FOR SOME MONTHS BY ASPRING ADECO PRECANDIDATES. THESE INCLUDE, IN ADDITION TO PINERUA HIMSELF, OCTAVIO LEPAGE, CARLOS CANACHE MATA, AD SENATOR REINALDO LEANDRO MORA AND DAVID MORALES BELLO. LEPAGE, A LONGTIME PARTY WHEELHORSE, IS NOT AN AGGRESSIVE LEADER, BUT COULD BE A COMPROMISE CANDIDATE IF THE OTHER ASPIRANTS SHOULD KNOCK EACH OTHER OUT. WHILE INTERIOR MINISTER HE WILL REMAIN MUCH IN PUBLIC EVIDENCE. CANACHE, LONG AN AMBITIOUS PARTY INSIDER, IS NOW IN AN IMPROVED POSITION AS AD SECRETARY GENERAL TO FURTHER HIS PRESIDENTIAL HOPES. LEANDRO, ANOTHER ADECO CHIEFTAIN, HAS BEEN LESS HEARD OF LATELY BUT IS BUSY MANEUVERING BEHIND THE SCENES FOR PARTY SUPPORT. MORALES, PRESIDENT CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ' CAMPAIGN MANAGER IN 1973, IS A FIERCE ADECO PARTISAN WHO HAS A NUMBER OF ENEMIES IN THE PARTY, ESPECIALLY LEPAGE AND, CONFIDENTIAL

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REPORTEDLY, PINERUA.

5. PRESIDENT PEREZ HAS BEEN CAREFUL TO HOLD ALOOF FROM THIS INTRA-PARTY MANEUVERING, ALTHOUGH IT IS THOUGHT AT THIS TIME THAT HE IS INCLINED TOWARD PINERUA. HIS GREATEST CONCERN IS THAT THE PARTY NOT FALL INTO PUBLICLY SQUABBLING FACTIONS IN A PRE-MATURE ELECTION CAMPAIGN. IN THIS DESIRE HE IS STRONGLY BACKED BY ACCION DEMOCRATICA FOUNDER AND INFLUENTIAL PARTY ELDER STATESMAN

EX-PRESIDENT ROMULO BETANCOURT, WHO ON HIS RETURN TO VENEZUELA IN NOVEMBER 1974 NOT-SO-PRIVATELY ADMONISHED THE PARTY TO THINK LESS ABOUT 1978 AND MORE ABOUT VENEZUELA'S PROBLEMS AT HAND.

6. PINERUA'S STRATEGY NOW SEEMS TO BE TO WORK HARD BUT QUIETLY FOR THE AD SECRETARY GENERALSHIP, CONCILIATING OR OUTFLANKING HIS RIVALS, REFRAINING FROM COSTLY AND DIVISIVE GUT-FIGHTING, AND SEEKING TO EMERGE AS THE PARTYS ANOINTED CANDIDATE BY CONSENSUS. IF HE CAN PULL THIS OFF HE WILL PROBABLY SECURE THE WARM SUPPORT OF PRESIDENT PEREZ, WHICH WILL BE ESSENTIAL IN THE CHOICE OF THE NEXT AD CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT OF VENEZUELA.

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